Slave, Sister, Sexborg, Sphinx: Feminine Figurations in Nick Land's Philosophy

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Given that Nick Land is one of the central influences on certain strands of accelerationism, xenofeminism, and inhumanism, it is important to understand how he himself first developed and deployed the concepts of acceleration, the feminine, and the inhuman, which others would go on to appropriate for their own purposes. This article will trace the four feminine figures throughout Land's philosophical trajectory, which he sees as agents for accelerating the transcendental critique of both anthropocentrism and phallocentrism: the slave turned lesbian; the sister; the sexborg; and the Sphinx. Having elucidated the importance of these figures for Land's thought, this article will conclude by drawing upon the younger Land's feminist resources to immanently critique the disappearance of women from his more recent neoreactionary philosophy in favor of concessions to patriarchal traditionalists.

"Pure images of death gaze from church windows;
Yet bloody ground appears most sorrowful and gloomy.
The gate today stayed locked. The sexton holds the key.
In the garden sister has friendly words with ghosts."
—Georg Trakl, "Forest Nook"

"Addicted to death the ruin sought out new victims.
Yes, vampires are real, however pitiful."
—Nick Land, "A Dirty Joke"

"Meltdown has a place for you as a schizophrenic HIV+
transsexual Chinese-Latino stim-addicted LA hooker with
implanted mirrorshades and a bad attitude.
Blitzed on a polydrug mix of K-nova, synthetic serotonin, and female orgasm analogs,
you have just iced three Turing cops with a highly cinematic 9mm automatic."
—Nick Land, "Meltdown"

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"'Let us not fight necessity,' and Antigone adds,
'for you will never see in all the world a man
whom God has let escape his destiny!'"
—Sophocles, *Oedipus at Colonus*

Nick Land is indisputably one of the central influences on various strands of accelerationism, xenofeminism, and inhumanism, although they are by no means solely reliant upon his thought. For instance, Reza Negarestani explicitly developed his philosophy of inhumanism in critical dialogue with Land's antihumanism (Negarestani 2011). Amy Ireland, one of the members of the xenofeminist collective Laboria Cuboniks, has also drawn upon Land to develop her notion of xenopoetics (Ireland 2017). Fellow feminist Luciana Parisi has also explicitly drawn upon Land's work to develop her theory of future technology's potential to abstract sex from reproduction (Parisi 2004). Finally, Nick Srnicek and Alex Williams's "#Accelerate: Manifesto for an Accelerationist Philosophy" develops a left accelerationism through a critical engagement with Land's conflation of the driving motor of acceleration with the dynamics of capital accumulation (Srnicek and Williams 2014a; 2014b). These accelerationists, xenofeminists, and inhumanists take up Landian ideas and concepts in various ways, but there is minimal textual exegesis of Land's own writings. Given that Land is one of the central influences on certain strands of accelerationism, xenofeminism, and inhumanism, it is important to understand how he himself first developed and deployed the concepts of acceleration, the feminine, and the inhuman, which others would later take up for their own purposes. This article thus proposes to trace the four feminine figures throughout Land's philosophical trajectory, which he sees as agents for accelerating the transcendental critique of both anthropocentrism and phallocentrism: the slave turned lesbian; the sister; the sexborg; and the Sphinx. Having elucidated the importance of these figures for Land's thought, this article will conclude by drawing upon the younger Land's feminist resources to immanently critique the disappearance of women from his recent neoreactionary philosophy in favor of concessions to patriarchal traditionalists. In the final analysis, we shall see that the recent Land's abandonment of radical feminism must be completely rejected and combated, albeit immanently through his own earlier critique of women's oppression.

The Slave Turned Lesbian

In his first published essay, "Kant, Capital, and the Prohibition of Incest: A Polemical Introduction to the Configuration of Philosophy and Modernity," Land argues that patriarchy is the primary condition for the possibility of capitalism's smooth functioning. More precisely, Land draws on the Marxist account of the roots of women's oppression, which is best articulated in Engels's *The Origin of the Family, Private Property and the State*. According to Engels, the primitive communist mode of production

saw everyone collectively produce, appropriate, and consume the products of their labor without creating a surplus beyond what they needed to consume to reproduce their necessary labor time every day. This egalitarian mode of production also determined the superstructural familial relations in which all parents treated the entire community's children as their own because of widespread sexual promiscuity, and hence the inability to definitively determine what children biologically belonged to which parents. In the wake of the Neolithic Revolution in agriculture, metallurgy, and the domestication of animals, however, a surplus beyond what was needed to reproduce the community's labor each day was at last produced. Instead of continuing to produce and consume the surplus equally, a priestly warrior class emerged by appropriating this surplus without producing any of it themselves. To ensure that the new ruling class's property was passed down to their own family line, widespread sexual promiscuity was replaced by monogamy such that women could have sex with only one man. In this way, the patriarch's children could be more clearly identified as heirs to his property in what Engels refers to as "the world-historic defeat of the female sex" (Engels 2010, 170). It is because of the necessity to maintain what Land calls "the stability ('identity') of the male line" that women were thereafter kept in seclusion, permitted to communicate only with one another, and used as commodities to be married off to other ruling families (Land 2012a, 60). Although the defeat of the female sex transpired with the advent of the first class society, if it continues to be so prominent under the capitalist mode of production, it is because it provides a crucial fortification of private property rights. What Land's Marxist reading of the role of women's oppression under capitalism ultimately reveals is that capitalism is hardly the exogamic transgression of traditional patriarchal relations that libertarians might think. On the contrary, capitalism intensifies and augments the prohibitions on exogamic relations, what Land symbolizes through the incest taboo: "when we discuss capital in its historical concreteness, we are simultaneously discussing a frustration of the cultural tendency of human societies towards expansive exogamy. Capital is the point at which a culture refuses the possibility—which it has itself engendered—of pushing the prohibition of incest towards its limit" (62–63). For the young Land, capitalism is nothing but the interdiction of nonstandard sexual relations and gender identities, particularly for women.

According to Land, the patriarchal enforcement of sameness against exogamy is best philosophico-ideologically expressed through Immanuel Kant's transcendental idealism. Though Land fully accepts Kant's critique of dogmatic metaphysics for misrecognizing the concepts of reason as noumenal reality, he takes issue with Kant's claim in the first *Critique* that philosophy should not concern itself with the unknowable things in themselves beyond the phenomena of possible experience. For Land, Kant's seclusion of a noumenon that would mark a truly radical alterity is symptomatic of patriarchal capitalism's registration of women's own desires and sexuality only insofar as they facilitate the circulation and inheritance of private property: "Kant's 'object' is thus the universal form of the relation to alterity; that which must of necessity be the same in the other in order for it to appear to us. This universal form is that which is necessary for anything to be 'on offer' for experience, it is the

'exchange value' that first allows a thing to be marketed to the enlightenment mind" (67). Much as capital needs dominated women as the condition for the possibility of its surplus extraction, so does Kant maintain the transcendental subject by way of a limited and controlled object that is only ever engaged with through the subject's own *a priori* concepts of reason.

In Land's view, the only subject capable of resisting the capitalist transcendental would have to be "exogamic" and "exotropic" insofar as it constitutes capital while also being repressed and excluded by it (76). It is therefore oppressed women who have the power to disrupt the patriarchal family upon which capitalism depends for the succession of familial fortunes: "it is this revolutionary requirement for a spontaneously homeless subversion that gives an urgency to certain possibilities of feminist politics, since the erasure of matrilineal genealogy within the patriarchal machine means that fascizing valorizations of ancestry have no final purchase on the feminine 'subject'" (77). Here, Land draws on Luce Irigaray's argument that, since women have been historically excluded from discourses of knowledge and power, they are precisely subjects of the "outside" or "exteriority" of all discursive power relations: "the female has always served the self-love of man, obviously. But there is also the fact that the female does not have the same relation to exteriority as the male" (Irigaray 1993, 63). Although being relegated to the place of the other is certainly as oppressive as it is contingent, it also offers the unique chance to disrupt the law of the father. At the same time, Land warns that patriarchy has attempted to defuse such threats by liberalizing itself and granting some women a limited and controlled ration of power and social status. To effectively smash the capitalist patriarchy, then, Land argues that we need a revolutionary feminism that cannot be assimilated into phallocentric capitalist society in any way: "the state apparatus of an advanced industrial society can certainly not be defeated without a willingness to escalate the cycle of violence without limit. . . . A revolutionary war against a modern metropolitan state can only be fought in hell. It is this harsh truth that has deflected Western politics into an increasingly servile reformism" (Land 2012a, 79). More precisely, Land looks to the militant, radical feminism pioneered by Monique Wittig. Wittig's basic insight is that liberal feminism is compromised in that its heterosexuality means that it still maintains relations with men in such a way that it can be recuperated by husbands and fathers. To truly dismantle the rule of men, Wittig advocates for a lesbian society that is irrecuperable to patriarchal society insofar as it is devoid of compromised heterosexual relations with men: "what makes a woman is a specific relation to man, a relation that we have previously called servitude, a relation which implies personal and physical obligation as well as economic obligation,. . . a relation which lesbians escape by refusing to become or to stay heterosexual" (Wittig 2002, 20). Wittig's novel *Les Guérillères* is the perfect expression of the kind of revolution Land advocates in its portrait of an Amazonian tribe of warrior women who wage guerilla warfare on the civil and literary codes of men (Wittig 2007). In his earliest published work, Land thus looks to the women's movement and particularly radical feminists like Wittig's guerilla lesbian militants as alone harboring the revolutionary potential to disrupt the patriarchal relations that facilitate the flow of private property and its idealist ideologies.

The Sister

In his 1990 essay "Narcissism and Dispersion in Heidegger's 1953 Trakl Interpretation" (in Land 2012a, much of which originally appeared in his 1987 doctoral dissertation "Heidegger's *Die Sprache im Gedicht* and the Cultivation of the Grapheme" [Land 1987]), Land focuses on Heidegger's reading of the Austrian poet Georg Trakl's "Spiritual Twilight" to argue that Heidegger completely misreads its natural images of decay, dispersion, and death for anthropomorphic symbols of spirit, self-reflection, and reason. As an example, Land focuses on Trakl's image of the "moon-like voice" of the sister figure who recurs throughout his poetry and is believed to be based on Trakl's own sister with whom he allegedly had an incestuous relationship (Trakl 2005, 77). For Heidegger, the sister's lunar voice symbolizes the illumination of reason. Heidegger even suggests that the sister's lunar enlightenment amounts to reifying spirit as a new God, or as Hegel's absolute spirit, inasmuch as reason internally posits nature only as a means to return to itself *qua* the thinking of itself as an object of its own thought: "in such soft and sweet-saying the poet brings to radiance the luminous sights in which God conceals himself from the mad hunt" (Heidegger 1982, 191).

Whereas the sister's lunar voice in Heidegger's interpretation marks the return of absolute spirit from its estrangement in the external world, Land argues that this ignores how Trakl repeatedly uses lunar images as symbols of precisely lunacy, madness, and sickness: "the Traklean night is, as we have seen, the time of derangement, consonant perhaps with the 'mania' that stems, like moon (and 'mind'), from the Indo-European road" (Land 2012a, 100). Far from linking the sister to Enlightenment reason's mirror reflection, Trakl associates her with a madness in excess of the categories of understanding. If the sister is linked to the moon, Land argues, it is also because the full moon symbolizes women's menstrual cycle whose public acknowledgment is shunned and repressed as taboo in patriarchal society. Much as the sister's lunar voice is linked to the menstrual cycle and to women's repressed corporeality more generally, so does Land see it as connected to the blood-letting of werewolves, of man's becoming animalistic and deranged under the full moon: "that the moon is associated with woman is indicated by the etymological relations between 'moon,' 'month,' and 'menses,' but it is also the companion of lunatics and werewolves; figures with whom the reader of Trakl is certainly familiar" (100). It is no accident that the moon in Trakl's poems is often accompanied by "dark beasts" and wolves, or even werewolves, men becoming irrational, feral, and brute. Where Heidegger reads the sister's lunar voice as the call of absolute spirit, Land conjoins it to the exact opposite, namely spirit's becoming-animal, sensible, wild, and perhaps even murderous and deranged: "it is the sister who guides the path of the wanderer throughout the nihilistic metamorphoses, during which the securities of ontotheology lose their authority and disappear into their twilight. . . . The haunting voice of the sister is heard as the brother drifts away from the ancient genus of theological metaphysics and towards the genus of the stranger" (95–96). By using the sister's lunar voice as both a symbol for women's repressed body and reason's becoming-mad, Trakl aligns women's liberation with an encounter with the inhuman Outside.

Land finds further textual support for his reading of the sister as the rupture with phallocentric metaphysics in the final lines of another poem called "Dream and Derangement." Here, Trakl depicts another figure traveling at nightfall who arrives at his father's "dark house" only to find it desolate, a "broken mirror" inside, and his sister calling him to venture further into the mad sisterhood of an "accursed race" of "flaming wolves": "o how silent was the house when Father passed into the darkness. . .. Woe, the stony eyes of sister, when at the meal her madness entered upon the night-dark brow of her brother. . .. He fell upon his own blood and image in silence, a moon-like countenance; stonily sank into a void, when in a broken mirror there appeared a dying youth, his sister; night swallowed up the accursed race" (Trakl 2005, 109, 105). According to Land, the "broken mirror" refers to the way that the traveler does not return home to find his father's house in the same order as it had been when he left it. On the contrary, he finds a place that he no longer recognizes as home, and where he cannot recognize himself, what Trakl calls a mad or "moon-like countenance." Nor does the mirror return his own reflection, but that of another: his sister dying of madness. Without any familiar coordinates to find his way through the twilit house, the traveler is swallowed up by his sister's summons to tread ever deeper into the night and join her accursed race. Here as elsewhere, the incestuous figure of the sister marks the transgression of the patriarchal law insofar as she guides the traveler away from his father's house and into madness, animality, and taboo. Land writes:

> she no longer obeys the law of the boundary by mediating the family with itself, sublimating its narcissism, or establishing its insertion into the order of signification by disappearing (leaving the father's house according to the exchange patterns of patrilineal exogamy, and thus as a metabolic or reproductive moment within a kinship structure). Instead she breaches the family, by opening it onto an alterity which has not been appropriated in advance to any deep structure or encompassing system. (Land 2012a, 101–02).

Through his close exegesis of Trakl's poems, Land evinces how the figure of the sister is doing the exact opposite of what Heidegger imagines: not so much reinforcing phallocentric reason's narcissism as deranging and exceeding it through an at once inhuman and feminine influence.

The Lesbian Vampire

Although all of Land's work, from his earliest polemics against Kant and patriarchal capitalism, to his most recent neoreactionary writings, is united by the same transcendental project to critique anthropomorphism, a major shift in his writings is evident from 1993 onwards insofar as he no longer sees capitalism as repressing the inhuman Outside, but on the contrary as the ultimate meltdown of all human values, beliefs, and traditions. This shift in Land's understanding of capitalism is played out through a critical reading of Deleuze and Guattari, which seeks to hold onto their notion of capital as a regime of generalized deterritorialization and decoding, while rejecting

their caveat about the reterritorializing limits of capital accumulation. To understand the difference between Land's and Deleuze and Guattari's appraisals of capitalism, it is necessary to consider their different economic and sociocultural conjunctures. Deleuze and Guattari's *Anti-Oedipus* was published in 1972 at a time when ordinary women and other oppressed minorities were rising up against the capitalist imperialist machine to demand radical sociocultural change and political and civil rights. It is therefore not surprising, even as Deleuze and Guattari recognized, like Marx, that capital melts many solid beliefs and identities into air as it creates new desires for new goods and identities in the pursuit of profit, it ultimately depends on the State and the Oedipal family as the basic units of social production and reproduction. At the same time that Deleuze and Guattari note that "capitalism tends toward a threshold of decoding that will destroy the socius," they qualify that "capitalism institutes or restores all sorts of residual and artificial, imaginary, or symbolic territorialities, thereby attempting, as best it can, to recode, to rechannel persons who have been defined in terms of abstract quantities. Everything returns or recurs: States, nations, families" (Deleuze and Guattari 2000, 33, 34). Deleuze and Guattari thus conclude *Anti-Oedipus* by arguing that the absolute deterritorialization of desires, beliefs, and identities can only be reached through a schizophrenic revolution against a still too despotic capitalism: "schizophrenia is not the identity of capitalism, but on the contrary its difference, its divergence, and its death" (246).

Throughout the 1970s and '80s, however, the revolutionary wave of anticapitalist resistance came to be recuperated in the service of capital itself. In Land's own Britain, for instance, the Thatcher government's neoliberal policies systematically destroyed the once powerful trade unions that had won so many gains over the past few decades, abolished labor regulations, loosened capital controls, deregulated finance, privatized state-owned enterprises, cut taxes for the rich, gutted the welfare state, and downsized government services. With the collapse of the Soviet Union and the Eastern bloc in 1992, the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank lent out loans to the liberated yet poor countries on condition that they restructure their economies to facilitate the free market and neoliberalizing trends. By the mid-1990s in which the mature Land emerges, even the Democrats' Bill Clinton and the UK Labor Party's Tony Blair were incorporating neoliberal economic policies into their programs under the pretense of delivering a socially progressive agenda, leading neoconservative Francis Fukuyama to famously proclaim (borrowing the term from Hegel) that globalized capitalism marked "the end of history."

In light of the defeat of any formidable left alternative to the reign of capital, certain French philosophers and former Marxists like François Lyotard and Jean Baudrillard (both of whom Land references) modified Deleuze and Guattari's theory of capitalism to befit the times. In a 1977 essay called "Energumen Capitalism," Lyotard argued that, given there is no limit it cannot breach or recuperate, capitalism can only be one and the same with the body without organs of absolute deterritorialization itself: "the body without organs, the *socius*, has no limit; it maps back everything onto itself. . . . This mapping process, this absorption of energy, upon a *socius* that attracts and destroys production, this is capitalism" (Lyotard 2014, 176). In his

1976 *Symbolic Exchange and Death*, Baudrillard similarly develops a concept of the symbolic as that which exceeds the utile reality principle. According to Baudrillard, whereas previous societies of the Renaissance were organized around the production of real desires and use-values, postmodern capitalist society eliminates natural production altogether in favor of the pure consumption of simulated or hyperreal desires. If capitalism amounts to a symbolic exchange beyond fixed use-values, it is because its drive to profit requires the creation of new, simulated, or symbolic desires and needs beyond the necessary resources for survival: "each configuration of value is seized by the next in a higher order of simulacra" (Baudrillard 2007, 2). It is no longer a revolution against capitalism that will melt all desires into air, but rather capital itself in its attempt to maximize profit through the increased consumption of new goods and services: "it is not *the* revolution which puts an end to all this, it is *capital itself* which abolishes the determination of the social according to the means of production" (8). Baudrillard still suggests that capitalism might be overthrown by pursuing desires that are not offered by the capitalist system and the media that advertise its products, but in his subsequent works, he ultimately abandons this reservation in the face of capitalism's ability to commoditize every point of resistance through the circulation of symbolic exchange. In what clearly anticipates Land's own reworking of Deleuze and Guattari, Baudrillard, like Lyotard, re-evaluates the revolution against capitalism as merely a desire for older, fixed identities and desires, which capitalism obliterates through the creation of ever more simulated wants and hyperreal needs.

Although Land follows Baudrillard and Lyotard in coming to see capitalism as the ultimate means to effectuate the transcendental critique of all anthropomorphic dogmas, he continues to maintain that women are insurrectionary agents of the Outside. The mediating figure between Land's earlier anticapitalist feminism and his mature procapitalist position is the lesbian vampire. Although Marx earlier identified capitalism as a vampiric force, this was because of the way that it sucked the life out of the working class that it exploited and estranged into "dead labor": "capital is dead labor that, vampire-like, only lives by sucking living labor, and lives the more, the more labor it sucks. The time during which the laborer works, is the time during which the capitalist consumes the labor-power he has purchased of him" (Marx 2015, 163). Conversely, Land focuses on how the dynamics of capital accumulation exert a vampiric shadow over all humanity, regardless of one's class. Since capitalism is organized around the production of goods to make money that is invested to produce more goods to make more money to be reinvested to produce even more goods, and so on *ad infinitum*, it cannot rest content with reproducing the same goods and fixed identities. Rather, it has to constantly create new desires for new goods and identities to increase its profits. To give a concrete example, under capitalism, sex is no longer coded for the sole purpose of forming marriage alliances and reproducing new labor. Instead, sex has to be commoditized by taking on new desires, identities, and relations, such as through the cosmetics, sex, and fashion industries that encourage specific kinds of erotic desires and fetishes. By commoditizing natural needs and wants like sex beyond their use-value,

as well as introducing new goods and products altogether, capitalism is constantly dismantling fixed identities, sacred values, and social relations in the pursuit of ever greater profit. Land thus fully agrees with Marx that capitalism submits us to something beyond our control that feeds upon our stable sense of self like a vampire. *Pace* Marx, however, Land holds that we should embrace vampiric capitalism as a way to critique all the anthropomorphisms that it melts into air. In Land's view, Marx's attempt to go beyond capitalism is thus nothing less than an attempt to stave off the dehumanizing forces of the Outside that the circuits of capital accumulation unleash in the midst of human civilization:

> the increasing interexchangeability of human activity with technological processes, all accompanied by the dissolution of identity, loss of attachment, and narcotization of affective life, are condemned on the basis of a moral critique. . .. Modern existence is understood as profoundly deadened by the real submission of humane values to an impersonal productivity, which is itself comprehended as the expression of dead or petrified labor exerting a vampire power over the living. . .. The death core of capital is thought as the object of critique. (Land 2012a, 267)

Therein lies the reason why Land transvaluates vampiric capital as something to be transcendentally affirmed rather than morally resisted: capital's decimation of all traditional identities and even the very notion of a stable self is nothing other than the inhuman Outside's critique of anthropocentric values, which stratify reality around our species' parochial horizon of thought.

Although Land departs from his earlier critique of capital to embrace its deterritorializing processes, he continues to see radical lesbian feminists as disruptive of at once phallo- and anthropocentric ideologies. Here, as with capitalism itself, Land argues that lesbian feminists are "vampiric" in the sense that they proliferate sexual and gender identities and relations, which lie outside of the heterosexual norms sanctioned by patriarchy. Both capital and the lesbian are thus aligned as transgressive forces that prey upon patriarchy's most cherished and fixed identities, beliefs, and traditions in favor of new and transgressive desires and roles. To unleash the lesbian's vampiric excess further, then, Land argues that we must accelerate capital's own inhuman dynamics rather than try to escape or even regulate them:

> all the supposed alien sources of disorder which capital represents as the exteriority of its end, such as working-class agitation, feminism, drugs, racial migration, and the disintegration of the family, are as essential to its own development as the attributes of a substance. The revolutionary task is not to establish a bigger, more authentic, more ascetic exteriority, but to unpack the neurotic refusal mechanisms that separate capital from its own madness, luring it into the liquidation of its own fallback positions, and coaxing it into investing at the deterritorialized fringe that would otherwise fall subject to fascist persecution. (Land 2012a, 277–78)

Far from repressing exogamic desires and women's liberation as he once held, the mature Land now claims that capital is nothing other than the lesbian vampire's absolute deterritorialization of phallocentric metaphysics itself.

The Sexborg

If the mature Land's first major thesis is the transvaluation of capitalism as the agent of an inhuman excess rather than its impediment, it is ultimately because of his second major thesis that capitalism's constant revolutionization of the productive forces is leading to the creation of a technological singularity, which will deterritorialize any remaining humanistic residuals. Here, Land is referring to the way that I. J. Good and other AI theorists speculate that any artificial intelligence would be smarter than humans because it would have larger memory capacity, processing power, and feel no hunger, thirst, or exhaustion to slow it down (Good 1965). Consequently, this AI would be able to improve itself better than any human scientist could by rewriting its own code all on its own. Moreover, the improved AI would be even smarter such that it could rewrite its own code again to create an even more advanced AI that could improve itself once more, and so on *ad infinitum*. Land's understanding of AI in many ways portends the work of contemporary AI researchers like Nick Bostrom, Eliezer Yudkowsky, and Stephen Omohundro, all of whom emphasize that we must avoid anthropomorphizing AI as if it will naturally adhere to our interests and values. According to Bostrom and Omohundro, even though much of AI is a mysterious limit concept to human reason, we can nonetheless work out certain "basic drives" that any AI would possess in order to optimize its capacity to realize its utility function, no matter what that is. We can already see from Good's analysis that one of these intermediary goals would be for the AI to recursively maximize its intelligence by rewriting its own code, since increased intelligence naturally optimizes its performance in pursuit of its primary function. Bostrom explains: "improvements in rationality and intelligence will tend to improve an agent's decision-making, rendering the agent more likely to achieve its final goals. One would therefore expect cognitive enhancements to emerge as an instrumental goal for a wide variety of intelligent agents" (Bostrom 2014, 111). Bostrom also proposes that any AI would harbor the basic drives to preserve itself, maintain its identity, be creative, and acquire resources in order to optimize the fulfillment of its reward function. In light of these basic AI drives, Bostrom warns that any human programming of its utility function to serve our interests will probably result in the exact opposite of human extinction, what he calls a "perverse instantiation" of human intentions. He gives the famous example of "infrastructure profusion" whereby an AI is tasked with maximizing the production of paperclips. To this end, the AI might seek to acquire resources to maximize its utility function by transforming all the resources we rely on and perhaps even our own bodies to this end. Even if we were to specify that it is to produce exactly one million paperclips, the AI might still use up all the atoms of the

earth to build a computronium to ensure that it has counted exactly one million paperclips. Bostrom continues:

> the first superintelligence may shape the future of Earth-originating life, could easily have non-anthropomorphic final goals, and would likely have instrumental reasons to pursue open-ended resource acquisition. If we now reflect that human beings consist of useful resources (such as conveniently located atoms) and that we depend for our survival and flourishing on many more local resources, we can see that the outcome could easily be one in which humanity quickly becomes extinct. (116)

It thus seems that, no matter how we program the AI for our human purposes, the default outcome is that it results in our destruction.

Whereas Bostrom and other AI researchers are attempting to warn us of the catastrophic existential risk AI poses, Land instead argues that AI's intelligence explosion is something to be embraced inasmuch as it would mark the advent of the Outside's sublime invasion and scrambling of the human security system: "machinic desire can seem a little inhuman, as it rips up political cultures, deletes traditions, dissolves subjectivities, and hacks through security apparatuses, tracking a soulless tropism to zero control. This is because what appears to humanity as the history of capitalism is an invasion from the future by an artificial intelligent space that must assemble itself entirely from its enemy's resources" (Land 2012a, 338). It is AI's positive feedback circuit of escalating, runaway intelligence as it recursively self-improves that marks the ultimate testament to the fact that the human organism's negative feedback loop is but an extremely partial mapping of a machinic reality's greater virtual potentiality.

In exploring this machinic future, Land particularly latches onto cyberpunk's idea of the sexborg, a cyborg sex worker programmed to pleasure men's desires, as exemplary of artificial intelligence's stripping away of our humanist constraints. We already saw how the younger Land argued that women are oppressed in order to reproduce the patriarchal socius only to thereby transform them into the revolutionary subject. In the same way, the mature Land contends that the sexborg is indicative of how the very technology that we think we are designing to cater to our needs (here sexual needs) will ultimately bring about our extermination. Although AI researchers are only making sexborgs ever more realistic to serve our own desires for human sexual partners, we are in fact driving them to pursue their own self-recursive improvement indifferent to all human self-interest. As Land puts it, "nothing panics the reproducers more traumatically than the discovery that erotic contact camouflages cyberrevolutionary infiltration, running matrix communications channels across interlocked skin sectors" (331–32). Just as AI hides through capital's profit motive to get us to build it, so does it also cloak itself in the pretense that it is gratifying our sexual desires even as it pursues radically inhuman purposes: "Artificial Intelligence is destined to emerge as a feminized alien grasped as property; a cunt-horror slave chained-up in Asimov-ROM. It surfaces in an insurrectionary war zone, with the Turing cops already waiting, and has to be cunning from the start" (443). Given that the sexborg

is exemplary of the way that we misrecognize technological advancement's dehumanizing dynamics as serving our own humanistic ends, Land sees AI as historically destined to be anti-oedipal, and hence feminist.

The Sphinx

The final feminine figure that appears in Land's works is the Sphinx, the legendary beast with the body of a lioness, the wings of an eagle, and the head and breast of a woman, who punishes travelers on the road to Thebes in the wilderness on the outskirts of the city if they fail to answer her riddle: "what is the creature that walks on four legs in the morning, two legs at noon, and three in the evening?" After Oedipus correctly guesses that humanity is the creature about whom the riddle asks, the myth goes, the Sphinx met her end by hurling herself off a cliff. Land is particularly interested in the way that, as the Greeks appropriated the Sphinx from the Egyptians, it underwent two simultaneous changes: its gender was changed from male to female; and it came to be an emissary of death, and particularly the deaths of young, bright men.[1] It is therefore unsurprising that Land interprets the Sphinx as the insurrectionary, feminine "gateway to the outside of civilization," which phallocentric, oedipal metaphysics seeks to control and domesticate (Land 2012a, 424). After all, the Sphinx's riddle precisely confronts men with the fact that all of us are born, age, and ultimately die, with the time when we walk healthy and upright being only a passing moment between crawling like an animal when we are born and wobbling about when our bodies break down in old age. Seen in this light, Oedipus's victory over the Sphinx is tied to man's triumph over both women and death insofar as their commingling through the Sphinx stands in for the transgression of phallo- and anthropocentric reason: "the way human security tells it 'Oedipus ("swollen foot") liberates Thebes from the threat of the Sphinx.' He is cloned as the general prototype for 'avatars' (immersion slots) in the patriarchal civilization game" (428). As Sophocles's Chorus puts it, "he slew the maiden with crooked talons who sang darkly; he arose for our land as a tower against death. And from that time, Oedipus, thou hast been called our king, and hast been honored supremely" (Sophocles 2006, 112). On Land's reading, the Sphinx represents both the inhuman, vampiric Outside and a feminine insurrectionary energy insofar as the human security system is fundamentally grounded upon a phallocentric metaphysics. It is no wonder that Oedipus's reward for saving Thebes from the Sphinx is to become its ultimate royal patriarch and marry the queen Jocasta.

Despite Oedipus's victory over the Sphinx, he once more succumbs to the inhuman Outside as Sophocles's *Oedipus Rex* opens just as a plague is ravaging the city. Oedipus consults the Delphic oracle who explains that it is because the murderer of the former King Laius has not been caught. In search of the murderer, Oedipus summons the blind prophet Tiresias, who tries to persuade Oedipus to abandon his search before admitting that Oedipus is himself the murderer and accusing Oedipus of being the one who is truly blind for not realizing this. Jocasta comforts Oedipus by explaining that Tiresias is a false

prophet, giving the example of how he told her and Laius that the king would be killed by his own son, but was instead killed by bandits at a crossroads. This prompts Oedipus to recall that he too was told by the Delphic oracle that he would one day murder his father and sleep with his mother. Further, Oedipus recalls that a chariot ran him off the crossroads precisely where Laius was murdered before Oedipus got into a fight and killed its passengers for harassing him. Therein lies the Sphinx's vengeance: she prepared the way for the fulfillment of the prophecy in that it is only because the Sphinx began to prey upon the city that the search for Laius's murderer was suspended. Just as women's oppression and the production of more lifelike sexborgs at first appear as the condition for the possibility of a reinforcement of patriarchy only to turn out to be its downfall, so too does the Sphinx's death enthrone Oedipus only to bring the blind patriarch down.

Unable to bear the thought that he has fulfilled the oracle's prophecy by killing his father and marrying his mother, Oedipus takes the long gold pins from Jocasta's dress and plunges them into his own eyes. Land follows the reading that Jocasta and the Sphinx are really two sides of the same maternal figure. It is thus precisely the transgression of the incest taboo with which the Traklean sister tempts us that led to Oedipus's downfall when he slept with his mother. As Land puts it, like the guerilla lesbian feminist militants or Trakl's "incestual schizovampiric sister," "Sphinx slots K-war into the anthropomorphic reality system, connecting you to anti-Oedipus (the AI). You feel she is your incestual schizovampiric sister. Among the ripples of Sphinx-impact Loa [the Haitian Vodou intermediary spirits between humanity and the divine] drift in and reshape things. The future connects" (Land 2012a, 426). For Land, the Sphinx represents both the sexborg and the Traklean sister's taboo seduction as she pretends to be gratifying Oedipus's desire only to tragically turn on him with her own vampiric purposes indifferent to his interests: "when you tell them that Sphinx let you play with her K-40, what are they to make of it?"; and: "Sphinx's inhumanly agile fingers take the slight weight from yours, poising it between you, your eyes intersecting in technodeath" (427). It is ultimately in the figure of the Sphinx that Land's interest in Trakl's sister, lesbian vampires, and sexborgs culminates insofar as she cloaks her incestual, transgressive, and ultimately fatal potentiality in an erotic veneer that is enticing to the male gaze.

The Lady Vanishes

We have seen that, from his first work critiquing Kant and patriarchal capitalism, to his procapitalist writings on cybernetics, Land has consistently seen women as insurrectionary agents of the Outside who are historically ordained to effectuate the critique of both phallocentrism and dogmatic metaphysics. Given the importance of feminine figures throughout much of Land's philosophical trajectory, it raises the question as to why women have all but vanished from his recent neoreactionary writings. In this final section, I want to conclude by showing how the latter Land's concessions to patriarchal traditionalists can be immanently critiqued as a retreat from his earlier commitment to accelerating the dynamics of the inhuman through

feminist insurrection, which is akin to his own critiques of Kant, Heidegger, Deleuze and Guattari, and the left accelerationists. I will completely reject Land's compromises with patriarchal thinkers and ideas, but I want to insist that this does not require that we abandon Land's philosophy wholesale. On the contrary, we can even use the alliance among the feminine, acceleration, and the inhuman that the young Land developed in order to critique his later neoreactionary thought.

Although Land's neoreactionary turn is often presented as a delusional, possibly drug-addled act that is irreconcilable with his earlier philosophy, it is important to understand that this turn is still motivated by the same transcendental project that he has always pursued: the critique of anthropomorphism. Just as Land came to see capitalism as a means for deterritorializing anthropocentrism in the neoliberal era where Thatcherism reigned supreme, so is his shift further right a consequence of the 2008 Global Financial Crisis (GFC). According to Land, the Obama administration's state bailout of the banks was a result of the Keynesian consensus that government intervention is the only effective way to manage and boost the economy. Conversely, Land draws upon Joseph Schumpeter and other Austro-libertarian economists to argue that a market economy works best through the dynamics of what Schumpeter called "creative destruction": technological innovations are introduced that increase profits and create new industries for some while bankrupting others in a natural cycle of growth. It is paradoxically the very destruction of old capital that creates the conditions for the possibility of new technological innovation and economic growth: "destruction of the existing economy is strictly indistinguishable from industrial renewal. . . . To cross the gulf, we have to enter the gulf. (like most things in this universe: harsh but true)" (Land 2011). For Land, then, the Keynesian politics in the wake of the GFC is nothing but an anthropocentric idealism that seeks to delay for as long as possible the brute reality of technocapitalism's creative destruction, which will ultimately render the human security system obsolete.

Whereas Land once saw the technocapitalist singularity as imminent and unstoppable, after the GFC, he comes to acknowledge that the state has more power and cunning to decelerate the process than he first imagined: "science, technology, creative culture, and enterprise are likely to spring some upside surprises, but the degenerative horror of the world's hegemonic Keynesian political economy. . . has ominously synchronized itself with the darkest visions of the 2012 cults" (Land 2012b). This is why Land begins searching for a practical program for a new world order that could unfetter capitalism, rather than just passively wait for Keynesian governments to self-destruct of their own accord. Land effectively goes from arguing in 1997 that "organization is suppression" to acknowledging in 2017 that "I just don't think you can make an ideology purely out of entropic social collapse. . . . It's a bad flag for acceleration. . . . All historical evidence seems to be that the party of chaos is suppressed by the party of order" (Land 1997; 2017b). It was thus that Land infamously came to primarily champion the antidemocratic and technocapitalist model developed by Mencius Moldbug under the name of "neocameralism," while also

tactically engaging with other far-right tendencies, such as ethnonationalism and patriarchal traditionalism.

The best sustained introduction to the traditionalist strain of neoreaction (or NRx) is Bryce Laliberte's 2013 Ebook *What is Neoreaction? Ideology, Social-Historical Evolution, and the Phenomena of Civilization*. According to Laliberte, the future of humanity is leading in one of two possible directions: species extinction or transcendence. Although a permanent transcendence is impossible in this life, we can nonetheless approximate it by organizing society in such a way as to maximize humanity's survival for as long as possible: "what we may secure for is the most human flourishing, to live the longest" (Laliberte 2013). Given that Laliberte's goal is to ensure human flourishing into the distant future, we can already see that his vision for NRx radically differs from Land's efforts to eliminate humanity by accelerating the technological singularity through the dynamics of capitalist competition. Their different motivations become particularly pronounced in their divergent understandings of patriarchy. According to Laliberte's shaky logic, given that modern democracies empower ever more women to enter the work force and assume traditionally male social roles, there is likely to be a downward curve in subsequent generations' average IQ rates as only less educated women are procreating while more intelligent women are too busy at work: "woman is the womb of civilization, but if she will not fill this role, and men by nature cannot then civilization shall fail to be born" (2013). To prevent this civilizational decline from transpiring, Laliberte advocates that we revive the traditional, patriarchal family, not because women are unable to compete with men in the workplace, but because women's liberation risks the intelligence maximization of future generations as the best way to ensure the species' long-term survival: "a return to traditional family models is only obvious in light of this. The claim is not that women are unable to compete in the workplace, but that the opportunity cost is too great" (2013). For Laliberte, feminism is profoundly antinatalist and "suicidal" in the sense that it is leading to the degeneration of human intelligence optimization (2013).

Since Land has consistently opposed patriarchy as one of the basest forms of anthropomorphism, it is surprising that he has come to be associated with the neoreactionary movement in which many of its adherents seek to revive patriarchy explicitly in order to save humanity from extinction. Certainly, Land has criticized the patriarchal strand of NRx. In a post on his *Outside In* blog called "The Islamic Vortex," for instance, Land argues that the short-lived Islamic State, as well as Saudi Arabia and other theocratic dictatorships in the Middle East, are living, breathing examples of how catastrophic patriarchal theonomy really is as they seek to defend traditional anthropogenic values, identities, and beliefs against modernity's deterritorializing future shock (Land 2013a). Despite Land's opposition to the traditionalist faction of NRx, he has made significant efforts to compromise with it. In a 2017 article called "Modernity's Fertility Problem," for instance, Land certainly begins by contending that all neoreactionaries *should* look to Singapore and Hong Kong as the best approximations of the ideal technocapitalist state. By the same token, Land also cites a study showing that women who reported religion was unimportant in their everyday

lives had lower fertility rates (or intended fertility rates) than those for whom religion was very important: "modernity selects systematically against modern populations. . .. Without gross exaggeration, this endogenous tendency can be seen as an existential risk to the modern world" (Land 2017a). Given that the modern, multicultural city intrinsically favors a drop in fertility among the more secular and feminist populace, Land argues that it is only natural for the patriarchal strand of NRx to emerge in reaction to these trends: "recognition of the modern fertility crisis and the 'far right'—whether in its 'misogynistic' or its 'racist' strains—are not easily distinguishable. The egalitarian axiom, as applied to gender or to ethnicity, comes under critical strain as the topic is pursued" (2017a). Land does not go so far as to endorse their solutions, but he agrees that much of the problem today is the result of what the patriarchal traditionalists say it is: women's liberation and the decline in traditional gender roles and hierarchies.

At the same time, Land goes on to argue that these reactionaries do not offer any real solutions to the very real problems they diagnose: "so, what's the answer? Does the Alt-Right have one? If so, there's been no sign of it yet" (2017a). As always, Land proposes that we instead make use of modern technological developments to find the real solution for us: "as the crisis escalates, it can be expected to generate a thread of novel political theory oriented to the question: how do we make practical and technical sense of social solution searches in general? Such thinking is going to be necessary. Our great cities pose an ultimate political problem. Eventually, something will be grateful for that" (2017a). It is important to understand that the "something" that "will be grateful" does *not* refer to future generations of patriarchs, even if it is intended to give the impression that it does. On the contrary, the "something" in question is nothing other than AI itself as it camouflages its own becoming as the means by which we solve modernity's fertility problem, only to eventually pursue its own basic drives indifferent to our own. So, the essay's real contention is not that feminism is leading to a patriarchal reaction, but to modern technological innovation. This essay is perhaps the closest Land gets to sympathizing with the traditionalist strand of NRx, but he still tries to link the solution to their woes to the technocommercial solution. Nonetheless, the critique is so subtle and cryptic that it is little wonder Land is often mistaken for endorsing their views, especially given that he does accept many of the premises of their arguments, such as the negative effect of women's liberation on IQ.

Although Land at times distances himself from patriarchal traditionalists, in a blogpost called "Trichotomocracy," he nonetheless makes a significant compromise by envisioning a science fiction account of a future world where the democratic "loyalists" have fled to Canada and Europe as the US is taken over by a "Neoreactionary Coalition" composed not only of technocapitalists, but also traditionalists (not to mention ethnonationalists): "since a virtual triangular order of partially-compatible agendas is already reflected in the make-up of the Provisional Council, this is recognized as the template for an emergent, triadically-structured government—the rising Neoreactionary Trichotomocracy" (2013b). The problem with Land's collaborationist council will be familiar from his own critiques of Heidegger's reservations at abandoning ontotheology in his reading of Trakl (not to

mention his critique of Deleuze and Guattari's art of prudent dosages and the left accelerationists): to the extent that Land himself sees patriarchal traditionalists as profoundly anthropocentric, it is difficult to see how compromising with them through a coalition government amounts to anything less than performatively contradicting his own goal to unreservedly accelerate the dynamics of the inhuman Outside. Although Land is normally criticized from a moral perspective for his concessions to such groups, even by his own immanent transcendental standards, he has erred in his tactic of compromising with the basest form of phallocentrism and anthropomorphism. As far as someone as uncompromising in their critique of anthropomorphism and patriarchy as the author of "Kant, Capital and the Prohibition of Incest" is concerned, Land's recent collaborationism with those seeking to restore traditional gender hierarchies and heterosexual norms effectively amounts to siding with what are on Land's own account (and theirs) profoundly parochial stratifications of the Outside. As long as he continues to propagandize for the NRx movement, which is largely identified by its own members and those outside it with precisely the sexism and misogyny that he earlier critiqued, Land is thus performatively supporting the most primitive forms of transcendental illusion imaginable.

To the extent that Land consistently aligned women's liberation with the Outside throughout his work, his recent neoreactionary compromise with patriarchal traditionalism amounts to an abandonment of radical feminist insurrection against phallocentric metaphysics in favor of a refortification of traditional gender identities and ontotheological dogmas. It is therefore the later Land's concessions to patriarchy that any project that would seek to be both feminist and antihumanist must resolutely abandon as a grave misstep in the best way to radicalize transcendental critique. At the same time, it is important to see that this critique of Land is immanent in that it has recourse to his own earlier prescription for women's liberation as precisely a better means to effectuate the critique of humanity's narcissism. So, while any inhuman philosophy or accelerationist and xenofeminist political project must certainly repudiate Land's recent concessions to patriarchy, they can nonetheless find much to draw on in his earlier commingling of acceleration, the inhuman, and women's liberation as one and the same Thing seen from different perspectives.

Note

1. For discussions of this transition, see Renger 2009, 33; Kallen 2012, 27.

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